

James Hogg (1770-1835)

3 *The Fray of Elibank*

O wha hasna heard o' the bauld Juden Murray,
The lord o' the Elibank castle sae high?
An' wha hasna heard o' that notable foray,
Whan Willie o' Harden was caught wi' the kye?

Auld Harden was ever the king o' gude fellows, 5
His tables were filled in the room an' the ha';
But peace on the Border, that thinned his keyloes,
An' want for his lads was the warst thing of a'.

Young Harden was bauld of heart as a lion,
An' langed his skill an' his courage to try: 10
Stout Willie o' Fauldshope ae night he did cry on,
Frae danger or peril wha never wad fly.

"O Willie, ye ken our retainers are mony,
Our kye they rowt thin on the loan an' the lea;
A drove we maun hae for our pastures sae bonny, 15
Or Harden's *ae cow* ance again we may see.

"Fain wad I, but darena, gang over the Border;
Bucleuch wad restrain us, an' ruin us quite;
He's bound to keep a' the wide marches in order:
Then where shall we gae, an' we'll venture to-night?" 20

"O master, ye ken how the Murrays have ground you,
An' aften caroused on your beef an' your veal;
Yet spite o' your wiles an' your spies, they hae shunned you:
A Murray is kittler to catch than the deil.

"Sly Juden o' Eli's grown doytet an' silly, 25
He sits wi' his women frae morning till e'en;
Yet three hunder gude kye has the thrifty auld billy,
As fair sleekit keyloes as ever were seen."

“Then, Willie, this night we’ll gae herry auld Juden;
Nae danger I fear when thy weapon I see: 30
That time when we vanquished the outlaw o’ Sowden,
The best o’ his men were mishackered by thee.

“If we had his kye in the byres of Aekwood,
He’s welcome to claim them the best way he can:
Right sair he’ll be puzzled his title to make good, 35
For a’ he’s a cunning an’ dexterous man.”

Auld Juden he strayed by the side o’ the river,
When loud cried the warder on Haginshaw height,
“Ho, Juden, take care, or you’re ruined for ever!
The bugle of Aekwood is sounding to-night.” 40

“Ha, faith!” then quo’ Juden, “they’re nae men to lippen;
I wonder sae lang frae a fray they could cease.
Gae blaw the wee horn, gar my villains come trippin:
I have o’er mony kye to get restit in peace.”

Wi’ that a swaup fellow came puffin’ an’ blawin,’ 45
Frae high Philip-cairn a’ the gate he had run:
“O Juden, be handy, an’ countna the lawin,
But warn well an’ arm well, or else ye’re undone!

“Young Willie o’ Harden has crossed the Yarrow,
Wi’ mony a hardy an’ desperate man: 50
The Hogs an’ the Brydens have brought him to dare you,
For the Wild Boar of Fauldshope he strides in the van.”

“God’s mercy!” quo Juden, “gae blaw the great bugle;
Warn Flora, Traquair, an’ the fierce Hollowlee.
We’ll gie them a fleg: but I like that cursed Hogg ill; 55
Nae devil in hell but I rather wad see.

“To him men in arms are the same thing as thistles;
At Ancram an’ Sowden his prowess I saw:
But a bullet or arrow will supple his bristles,
An’ lay him as laigh as the least o’ them a’.” 60

The kye they lay down by the side of the Weel,

On the Elibank craig, an' the Ashiesteel bourn;
An' ere the king's elwand came over the hill,
Afore Will an' his men rattled mony a horn.

But Juden, as cunning as Harden was strang, 65
On ilka man's bonnet has placed a white feather;
An' the night being dark, to the Peel height they thrang,
An' closely they darnit them amang the deep heather,

Where the brae it was steep, an' the kye they did wend, 70
An['] sair for their pastures forsaken they strave;
Till Willie o' Fauldshope, wi' half o' the men,
Gade aff wi' a few to encourage the lave.

Nae sooner was Willie gane over the height, 75
Than up start the Murrays, an' fiercely set on;
An' sic a het fight, i' the howe o' the night,
In the forest of Ettrick has never been known.

Soon weapons were clashing, an' fire was flashing, 80
An' red ran the bluid down the Ashiesteel brae:
The parties were shouting, the kye they were rowting,
An' rattling an' galloping aff frae the fray.

But tho' weapons were clashing, an' the fire it was flashing,
Tho' the wounded an' dying did dismally groan,
Tho' parties were shouting, the kye they came rowting,
An' Willie o' Fauldshope drave heedlessly on.

O Willie o' Fauldshope, how sad the disaster! 85
Had some kindly spirit but whispered your ear:
"O Willie, return, an' relieve your kind master,
Wha's fighting surrounded wi' mony a spear."

Surrounded he was; but his brave little band, 90
Determined, unmoved as the mountain, they stood;
In hopes that their hero was coming to hand,
Their master they guarded in streams of their blood.

In vain was their valour, in vain was their skill,
In vain has young Harden a multitude slain;

By numbers o'erpowered, they were slaughtered at will, 95
An' Willie o' Harden was prisoner ta'en.

His hands an' his feet they hae bound like a sheep,
An' away to the Elibank tower they did hie;
An' they locked him down in a dungeon sae deep,
An' they bade him prepare on the morrow to die. 100

Though Andrew o' Langhope had fa'n i' the fight,
He only lay still till the battle was by,
Then ventured to rise, an' climb over the height,
An' there he set up a lamentable cry.

“Ho! Willie o' Fauldshope! Ho! are you distracted? 105
Ho! what's to come o' you? or where are you gane?
Your friends they are slaughtered, your honour suspected,
An' Willie o' Harden is prisoner ta'en!”

Nae boar in the forest, when hunted an' wounded,
Nae lion or tiger bereaved of his prey, 110
Did ever sae storm, or was ever sae stounded,
As Willie, when warned o' that ruinous fray.

He threw off his jacket, wi' harness well lined;
He threw off his bonnet well belted wi' steel;
An' off he has run, wi' his troopers behind, 115
To rescue the lad that they likit sae weel.

But when they arrived on the Elibank green,
The yett it was shut, an' the east it grew pale:
They slinkit away wi' the tears i' their e'en,
To tell to auld Harden their sorrowfu' tale. 120

Though Harden was grieved, he durst venture nae further,
But left his poor son to submit to his fate.
“If I lose him,” quo' he, “I may chance get another,
But never again wad get sic an' estate.”

Some say that a stock was begun on that night, 125
But I canna tell whether 'tis true or a lie;
That muckle Jock Henderson, time o' the fight,

Made off wi' a dozen of Elibank kye.

Brave Robin o' Singlee was cloven through the brain,
An' Kirkhope was woundit, an' young Bailleylee. 130
Wi' Juden, baith Gatehope an' Plora were slain,
An' auld Ashiesteel gat a cut on the knee.

An' mony a brave fellow cut off in their bloom,
Lie rotting in cairns on the bank o' the Steele:
Weep o'er them, ye shepherds! how hapless their doom! 135
Their natures how faithful, undaunted, an' leel!

The lady o' Elibank raise wi' the dawn,
An' she wakened auld Juden, an' to him did say, —
“Pray, what will ye do wi' this gallant young man?”
“We'll hang him,” quo' Juden, “this very same day.” 140

“Wad ye hang sic a brisk an' a gallant young heir,
An' has three hamely daughters aye suffering neglect?
Though laird o' the best o' the Forest sae fair,
He'll marry the warst for the sake o' his neck.

“Despise not the lad for a perilous feat; 145
He's a friend will bestead you, an' stand by you still;
The laird maun hae men, an' the men maun hae meat,
An' the meat maun be had, be the danger what will.”

Then owre his left knee Juden laid his huge leg,
An' he mused an' he thought that his lady was right. 150
“By heaven,” said he, “he shall marry my Meg;
I dreamed, an' I dreamed o' her a' the last night.”

Now Meg was but thin, an' her nose it was lang,
An' her mou' it was muckle as ane could weel be;
Her een they were gray, an' her colour was wan; 155
But her nature was generous, gentle, an' free.

Her shape it was slender, her manners refined,
Her shoulders were clad wi' her lang dusky hair,
An' three times mae beauties adorned her mind,
Than mony a ane's that was three times as fair. 160

Poor Will wi' a guard was brought into a ha',
Ae end hung wi' black, an' the ither full fair;
There Juden's three daughters sat in a raw,
An' himsel' at the head in a twa-elbow chair.

"Now, Will, as ye're young, an' I hope ye may mend, 165
On the following conditions I grant ye your life: —
That ye be mair wary, an' auld Juden's friend,
An' accept o' my daughter there Meg for your wife.

"An' since ye're sae set on my Elibank kye,
Ye's hae each o' your drove ye can ken by the head; 170
An' if nae horned acquaintance should kythe to your eye,
Ye shall wale half a score, an' a bull for a breed.

"My Meg, I assure you, is better than bonnie;
I rede you, in choicing let prudence decide;
Then say which ye will; ye are welcome to ony; 175
See, there is your coffin, or there is your bride."

"Lead on to the gallows, then," Willie replied;
"I'm now in your power, an' ye carry it high;
Nae daughter o' yours shall ere lie by my side;
A Scott, ye maun mind, counts it naething to die." 180

"Amen! then," quo' Juden, "your raid you shall rue,
Gae lead out the reaver loun straight to his deide;
My Meg, let me tell him 's the best o' the two:
An' bring him the bedesman, for great is his need."

When Will saw the tether drawn over the tree, 185
His courage misgae him, his heart it grew sair;
He watched Juden's face an' he watched his ee,
But the devil a scrap of reluctance was there.

He fand the last gleam of his hope was a fadin';
The green braes o' Harden nae mair he wad see. 190
The coffin was there, which he soon must be laid in;
His proud heart was humbled, — he fell on his knee:

“O sir, but ye’re hurried — I humbly implore ye,
To grant me three days to examine my mind;
To think on my sins, an’ the prospect before me, 195
An’ balance your offer of freedom sae kind.”

“My friendship ye spurned; my daughter ye scorned;
Forthwith in the air ye shall flaff at the spauld:
A preciouser villain my tree ne’er adorned;
Hang a rogue when he’s young, he’ll steal nane when he’s auld. 200

“Then here is my daughter’s hand, there is the rood,
This moment take the one or the other the niest;
'Tis all for your country an’ countrymen’s good —
See, there is the hangman, or here is the priest.”

But Willie now fand he was fairly i’ the wrang, 205
That marriage an’ death were twa different things. —
“What matter,” quo’ he, “though her nose it be lang?
For noses bring luck, an’ it’s welcome that brings.

“There’s something weel-faurd in her soncy gray een,
But they’re better than nane, an ane’s life is sae sweet; 210
An’, what though her mou’ be the maist I hae seen?
Faith, muckle-mou’d fock hae a luck for their meat.”

That day they were wedded, that night they were bedded,
An’ Juden has feasted them gaily an’ free;
But aft the bridegroom has he rallied an’ bladded, 215
What faces he made at the big hanging tree.

He swore that his mou’ was grown wider than Meg’s;
That his face frae the chin was a half a yard high;
That it struck wi’ a palsy his knees an’ his legs;
For a’ that *a Scott thought it naething to die!* 220

“There’s naething,” quo’ Juden, “that I mair approve,
Than a rich forest laird to come stealin’ my kye;
Wad Branxholm an’ Thirlstane come for a drove,
I wad furnish them wives in their bosoms to lie.”

So Willie took Meg to the forest sae fair, 225

